Assessing the Effects of Apple's Ban on Vaping Apps

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By mid-2018, as Juul's sales skyrocketed, the company was valued at a booming $15 billion. However, amid stringent investigations stemming from a rash of vaping-related illnesses and legal scrutiny due to tobacco laws, the company and the its industry as a whole have taken some flak. And on November 15, Apple made the unexpected and widely impactful decision to remove all vaping-related apps – apps that either encourage or facilitate the use of e-cigarettes – from their app store. Though they sought to reduce the damage that vaping has created, especially on the youth population, they have consequently removed apps that strive to help vape users wean off of nicotine, quit cigarettes,or quit vaping entirely. This should come as no surprise, however, as Apple has a history of removing apps with controversial implications. For example, in 2017, the tech behemoth stopped accepting nicotine-related apps.

However, over the past few years, software has proven to be an effective resource that enables smokers and vapers to drop the habit. Phone apps are perfect for tackling this problem, because nearly every person always has their phone handy Unfortunately, Apple has officially eliminated iPhone users's access to valuable tools that can be helpful to many who are trying to quit using nicotine.

Related: Mysterious Vaping Illnesses Have Industry on Edge

How Some Smokers Use Tech to Quit

Many smokers were using technology as one of the primary resources to quit smoking. Software can capture analytics, give users accurate insight into their smoking habit, and it can even restrict vape usage. For that very reason, phone apps with these abilities are crucial for people who really are trying to quit. However, Apple's recent removal of all vape-related apps is now closing off one of the most effective cessation methods that many vapers and smokers relied on.

I recently had Chad Manning, a co-founder of FLUUX, on my Entrepreneur podcast (go have a listen here!) and got a crash course on the vaping industry. FLUUX is a mobile app that helps vape users track key data and statistics, including usage and daily frequency, to help them quit. In specific cases, the app even allows users to subscribe to a "Doctor-Approved Vaping Cessation Program," which includes a coach, weekly coach meetings, prescribed medication (if needed), restrictions on vape usage and a forum where individuals can connect with people going through the same quitting process.

As FLUUX demonstrates, not all such apps promote the use of a vaporizer. Startup 2Morrow, for example, was even working with federal- and state-health departments and released an app that provides free resources to the public to help addicts quit their vaping habits. These apps were created to reduce the harm that vaping may potentially cause, as well as helping individuals improve their health.

Currently, due to the ban, if you do a simple search in the iPhone's App Store for "quitting vaping," only one app pops up; the rest are for quitting cigarettes. The one app found is called Quit Vaping-Become Vape Free. Though this app is free and looks very promising, Apple users are confined to this one option. In total, Apple removed 181 apps, including the revolutionary 2Morrow and FLUUX.

The Unforeseen Consequences of Apple's Decision

So, what does this mean for entrepreneurs? Personally, I'm pro-entrepreneurs (assuming the business is not doing anything illegal or immoral), and I think Apple's ban was too all-encompassing and will affect good companies negatively. It's tough enough to build a successful company and sucks when you're trying to hit a moving target.

If you are an entrepreneur and have some sort of vaping-related mobile app in the works, you will only be able to market to a certain demographic of people, i.e. those who own Androids (or Blackberries, if that's still a thing?). This isn't necessarily a bad scenario, but it does limit your market share. Apple's App Store is huge, and it will make a difference in how many people see your tech in the long run. I guess the silver lining is that if you're developing a native app and can only develop for Android, that cuts down about 50 percent of your work.

But the ultimate argument for keeping some apps in the App Store is that the helpful software enables the user to put their health back in their own hands so they can physically realize the damage they are doing to their bodies by tracking vape usage. Although Apple was acting in good faith, removing all vape-related apps has done many people a disservice, and now even apps that set out to help users wean off nicotine and ultimately quit smoking and vaping have been removed.

Related: Juul Announces That CEO Kevin Burns Has Stepped Down

Apps like 2Morrow and FLUUX were trying to solve the problem that the vaping epidemic has created and reduce the damage vaping has inflicted on the youth population. Unfortunately, iPhone users who smoke or vape will no longer see these apps in the App Store or be able to download a tool that could be

critical in improving their health.

My parting thought, then, is that smartphones should be the next addictive product Apple tries to thwart, as research has shown phones are even more addicting than nicotine. Although, I doubt Apple will be open to taking a bite out of their own bottom line when it comes to addictive behaviors.

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